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Notes on The Shattered Crystal Ball: Fear and Learning in the Cuban Missile Crisis, by James G. Blight

"...the number one goal of the United States and the Soviet Union [is] to avoid a nuclear war, a goal which in turn is judged by all who concern themselves professionally with these matters to mean that we must avoid deep crises that might lead to war."

The necessity of avoiding crises like CII is often cited, by participants like McNamara and others, as the central lesson of CII. But does that mean, for any of them or for any analyst making this point, that they have come to feel that CII itself should have been avoided, in terms of the US reaction to the Soviet missiles? It was this reaction, after all, which defined or determined or triggered the "crisis". Or if this is disputed, at the very least the US reaction was a necessary element in establishing a dangerous crisis.

Has any former defender of the US public policy ever switched toward reconsidering the necessity or prudence of the US blockade or ultimatums: e.g. in light of the new evidence of the last two years?

After all, it was not the case that every member of the ExComm first reacted to news of the missiles by assuming that their presence constituted or compelled a crisis in foreign policy (though they obviously determined a domestic "crisis" for the Administration, in the election campaign). Assumptions to the contrary are mistaken; assertions to the contrary by participants are false.

The "lesson" of the crisis leads to the question: Should CII have been averted by Kennedy, if not by Khrushchev? Should Kennedy have avoided creating a crisis, given Khrushchev's action (which, we now know, was in large part a response to Kennedy's covert actions against Cuba and preparations for invasion, and to US deploiments to Turkey)?

To say "yes" easily and unequivocally--despite what we now know of the real assessments by the President, his closest advisors, and the SecDef--is to deprive the supposed lesson of much content. If a major crisis was "unavoidable, necessary, appropriate" under those circumstances, then avoiding dangerous crises cannot be understood to be such an overriding priority after all.

The lesson would then seem to come down to a lesson for the Soviets alone; or at any rate, for both sides to avoid decisions "like Khrushchev's."

NOTES:

67: Inadvertence: "paradoxically initiated nuclear war."

Inadvertent "because in normal times, or even at the outset of such a crisis, leaders were not have believed that they eventually come to believe such a thing." [i.e., that "leaders' basic beliefs will become inverted regarding the relative worth of initiating a nuclear war."]

In such a crisis, striking first--or, first use--appears optimal, or is a candidate for optimality, requiring consideration. It is a situation "so relentlessly perverse, so apparently devoid of satisfactory options, that nuclear war is actually initiated."

But this situation is, in practical terms, easily specified: it is one in which an enemy first strike becomes "thinkable," or there is evidence or reason to believe that an enemy first strike "soon" is near-certain or highly likely (strategic warning), or may actually be underway (tactical warning).

JB assumes that "in normal times" leaders would not have believed that they ever would come to believe such a thing. "Under normal conditions" they believe (p. 68) that "No sane leader will want to start a nuclear war, under any circumstances," and "Purely accidental nuclear war or nuclear war via insanity is practically inconceivable."

Yet JB does not confront the fact that nuclear postures are designed on the assumption that strategic or tactical warning is conceivable, and that the appropriate response may be preemption. Both the circumstances and the response not only shape weapons and force posture, but they are endlessly rehearsed.

Is it possible that in the actual crisis, the circumstances, and possible response, are nevertheless experienced as "previously inconceivable," a sort of negative miracle?

Perhaps so. But this is not because, in fact, there was a total failure earlier to postulate and contemplate the possible of such a state of affairs, by anyone in authority (e.g., SAC), or even an absence of elaborate preparations and rehearsals.

Suppose we conceive a situation that is subjectively regarded as "unthinkable" even though it is being thought of almost constantly; as "virtually impossible" even it is being constantly prepared for, at great effort and expense. When it occurs, it comes as a shattering surprise, even though preparation for it has been a major societal project for many years.

How understand such a paradox? a) The preparations were meant to be deterrent, and they were expected to deter successfully, with

almost total assurance.

(b) The above explanation does not entirely apply to "damage-limiting" preparations, which are explicitly posited on the possibility that deterrence might fail. But at least in part, and for some advocates, these two are touted as "deterrent," even as necessary for deterrence (the logic is obscure or unconvincing for Type I Deterrence--deterrence of nuclear attack--but applies to Type II Deterrence--deterrence of non-nuclear attack on allies). Thus a failure of deterrence could still come as a "total" surprise to those who had pursued damage-limiting preparations.

c) Moreover, D-L (damage-limiting) might really have been pursued for other reasons, despite total disbelief in the possibility that they might actually be called upon in a nuclear war, or might work effectively then. Star Wars is a recent example of such reasons: outflanking the peace movement and blocking arms reduction agreements, keeping a profitable and politically rewarding arms race going; subsidizing high technology; getting credit for insuring against possible war from those members of the public who do believe in the possibility. In the case of offensive counterforce: keeping certain firms and industries in production; keeping certain Services happy, with their advocates in Congress; keeping up regional employment...

d) The political leadership might totally disbelieve in some possibilities, but "prepare" for them or insure against them to satisfy subordinate Service bureaucracies that do believe in them.

e) Certain preparations, once initiated because the possibilities of use were actually believed in, might continue for inertial--and ideological--reasons though belief in the contingencies had totally eroded.

f) The "threat" might be politically useful, to integrate and mobilize an alliance (NATO) or support the hegemony of its dominant member, even though not really believed in by officials; preparations might be required to validate the threat, to appear to believe in the threat.

Thus, preparations may not signify that the contingency ostensibly being prepared for is, subjectively, assigned any large probability or even any positive probability at all: it might be seen as "impossible, unimaginable, unthinkable" (though, to repeat, these last two terms should be understood as metaphoric or somewhat rhetorical, since the contingency is being imagined and thought about, despite its "impossibility").

But what of the fact that the preparations themselves--for damage-limiting by preemptive strike--especially when occurring on both sides, might make the actual contingency (actual fear,

possibly well-grounded--of an imminent enemy first strike) more likely in certain circumstances? (This supposes a special case of "insurance," in which the preparations that "insure" or "hedge" against the adverse consequences of a certain event can make this event more likely, in certain circumstances. This seems to be the case with "damage-limiting insurance.")

If this "makes sense," if it appears a plausible possibility, should it not lead to assigning some positive probability to the contingency at all times (given the preparations on both sides)? Should not the notion of its "impossibility" be rejected? Yet is it plausible that despite this connection, preparations might be pursued while the event being prepared for is still seen as "impossible"?

Perhaps. a) The connection, the potential danger of this "insurance" might not be well understood, especially by some high civilian officials.

b) Though understood as a theoretical possibility, the actual impact might be regarded as negligible. (Thus, McGeorge Bundy and many others--even, Halperin and Paine, as well as York and McNamara--see the instabilities caused by preparations for preemption as slight or negligible. Like Forsberg, (FAS...), Clifford Johnson, or Howard Morland, I do not.)

c) The very fact that this situation would be horrendous means that psychological denial or numbing could affect even those (like myself) who do worry about the possibility and act to avert it. In a long period without crises, and facing mental resistance, disbelief, or apathy from most listeners, our own resistance might come to be inertial, "going through the motions," so that the actual occasion would seem even to us--still more to our former audiences (despite their having heard it from us)--as not merely the occurrence of an unlikely event but as "astounding," as like the occurrence of the previously unthinkable or unimagined (despite our prolonged, somewhat noisy campaign).

In other words, another Cuban Missile Crisis, or "something worse," could be as surprising to officials as World War I was to officials then: despite prior elaborate and prolonged preparations for such a situation in both cases. (In the case of WWI, civilian officials had generally been unaware of the nature of military preparations, or their dangerous implications). That is the sense in which a war coming out of such a crisis would be "inadvertent."

To elaborate on JB's definition, "It is an inadvertent process because, in normal times, or even at the outset of such a crisis, leaders would not have believed that they eventually would come to believe such a thing [that nuclear war is worth initiating: or might be initiated by the adversary]" despite their having postulated such a possibility frequently to the public and having

prepared for it at vast expense for two generations.

But that is not a difference from World War I! JB's title is meant to suggest a difference between the circumstances leading to a possible World War III and those leading up to World War I. Nuclear war is said, by the Harvard Nuclear Study Group, to present a "crystal ball effect," which keeps the risks of nuclear war very low because the devastation at the end of a major war is inescapably obvious and horrible in prospect to officials. (p. 11). "This crystal ball effect helps to give the nuclear world at least some measure of stability," these authors contended. (Actually, they inferred a very high measure of stability).

"The horror provoked by the prospect of a major nuclear war seemed to these authors so obvious, so catastrophic and so unequivocally irrational that it is equally obvious why statesmen leading the nuclear superpowers have usually remained very far from the brink."

A nuclear war would shatter the crystal ball, along with everything else--thus, the title--and this, the Harvard group and JB argue, could happen only "inadvertently." How does such "inadvertence" occur despite the possession of a crystal ball?

What is suggested above is that the crystal ball may present only a partial picture. It does not confront all civilian officials with a compelling awareness:

(a) That striking first may actually look significantly better than striking second: when the prospect of the latter forces them to look very seriously at the two "options". (They may be unaware of this even though their military has been preparing to enlarge and exploit this difference for many years, authorized by these high civilian officials and with resources budgeted by them and by Congress for this purpose).

(b) That this may also be true for their adversary; and that an adversary's first strike may come to seem imminently possible or likely for this very reason.

(c) That their actions in a political or limited war confrontations might have the consequences of creating these circumstances, where the possible advantages of limiting damage by striking first rather than second come into awareness of top officials on both sides; or, precisely which actions might have what consequences like these.

These are the possibilities that were missing from the awareness of civilian officials prior to WWI: not the horrendous, to be avoided at (supposedly) all costs, nature of a world war, which was virtually as obvious to them then as in today's nuclear world. They did not foresee the actual course of the war, or its

duration, but on the other hand they exaggerated the economic and morale effects of the initial encounter in an all-out, industrialized war in bringing about the collapse of one or both of the contending parties. They saw it as catastrophic, unthinkable, in its effects on nation and empire, in much the same terms that we now see nuclear war.

So they too had a crystal ball, with the same information--and the same limitations--as today's. And it too moderated Great Power behavior in numerous crises--leading to retreats and compromises and the avoidance of some confrontations. It was not the lack of a crystal ball with properties like today's that gave us World War I. Just such a crystal ball existed, but the catastrophe it depicted came about anyway: and indeed, turned out to be even worse than had been imagined.

Would that war have been avoided if the full dimensions of the actual catastrophe had been seen clearly beforehand? Those who contrast the present situation with that in all earlier periods imply, "Yes." But that is very far from clear. In fact, I believe the answer is "No," in the long run, though the rulers might have been somewhat more cautious in a particular incident, such as that arising over Sarajevo.

This is assuming that the other properties--which also apply today--remained the same, including (a) preparations based on the assumption, and strengthening it, that preemption was much better than being struck first, and (b) a willingness to take the risk--underestimated, but not seen as zero--involved in threatening war or escalation against weaker allies of one's major adversary, and (c) unawareness (a clouded, or partly shrouded crystal ball) among some top civilian officials of the possible consequences of the above two conditions.

Given the technological "first strike advantage" in the era of World War I (like today) and the moral/psychological and gambling propensities of leaders then (like today), I do not believe that a still clearer picture than they possessed of the catastrophic character of all-out war would have made World War I markedly less likely in the decade in which it occurred.

There was indeed ignorance implicit in the decisions that led to World War I. But the critical ignorance was not lack of awareness that that major war (like today) would involve catastrophic risks of nation and empire, risks or certainties that outweighed any peacetime stakes. Rather, what leaders didn't know then, about the implications of their military preparations and the possible consequences of their alliances and threats and "demonstrations," are also matters of ignorance in high circles today.

The nuclear crystal ball is shrouded today for many high

officials--though, after World War I and a generation of strategic analysis, with less excuse--in just the same ways as before World War I. And the effect may again be the shattering of states and empires--and this time, civilizations, perhaps species, including our own.

An "inadvertent" nuclear war could come about exactly as World War I came about. (It could have come out of the Cuban Missile Crisis; or Berlin; perhaps Quemoy; or any of the first-use threats since, or Lebanon 1983). All the conditions present then exist today, and, I believe, there is no critical difference in awareness of the horrendous nature of a major war. The dangers of these conditions is knowable, foreseeable, though unknown and unforeseen by many, including some powerful authorities. The plans and their implications are less secret, more widely known and analyzed, than before WWI; yet not widely understood even within the anti-nuclear movement, or by many officials. Thus, I am not confident that this difference, either, is critical.

JB's thesis is that top civilians "learned" experientially, in their guts, these possibilities during the Cuban Missile Crisis; and therefore moderated their behavior and their demands, making a peaceful resolution of the crisis possible. They learned, by their own and their adversary's reactions, that nuclear war could occur despite the "crystal ball," and this very awareness helped keep it from occurring. Knowledge that the crystal ball could shatter protected it: and no doubt will continue to do so.

JB finds in the fact of possible instability--loss of control, inadvertence--and in the likelihood that top officials will discover it and respond appropriately to it in an intense crisis, a new source of safety, comfort, security. He has discovered, in one more form, the "stability of instability." A new form of Churchill's formulation of the paradox of the balance of terror: security as the sturdy child of terror. "Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety."

Just as the horror of nuclear war deters statesmen, so their fear of losing control of events, of becoming unable to prevent a slide into nuclear war, makes them cautious in a crisis, protecting us all from what they fear. So crises like the Cuban Missile Crisis are truly dangerous; but not as dangerous as they might be, or as they appear, because officials are likely to learn caution along with fear at the height of the crisis, if not earlier, and draw back from the brink.

Those are the twin lessons JB learned from the Cuban Missile Crisis: the second, final one, the bottom line, being reassuring, and explicitly supportive of the status quo of the arms race.

The first is valid, and important. It is supported by much of the newest evidence on the crisis; Garthoff's second edition emphasizes the new data on the ways in which control might have

been lost.

But JB's second conclusion seems invalid, falsely and therefore dangerously reassuring, contradicted by much new data whose implications JB ignores.

It is true that McNamara did appreciate the possibility of events spinning out of control toward nuclear war, and that this did moderate his recommendations. (This fact may have been the germ of Blight's project, or of his projected findings, several years ago). But nearly every other element of his argument, and thus his conclusions, is mistaken.

McNamara did not come to this awareness and concern just in the last 48 hours of the crisis, as a result of experiential learning during the crisis, as JB says repeatedly. He had this concern from the first hours of the "secret" crisis--i.e., before there were any responses from the Soviets--over ten days earlier.

To say this is to say that there is little or no evidence of critical "learning" during the crisis in this respect. But more importantly, it means that the risky actions that were taken--and serious risks of war were consciously taken, even though still more dangerous actions were rejected--were chosen after this appreciation of the risk of loss of control had become fully conscious to McNamara and the President.

Moreover, their concern, whether on the first day or the twelfth, did not lead to a peaceful resolution of the crisis, as JB repeatedly says. It was their ability to override and ignore their fears--at least temporarily and conditionally--that led to the actual resolution, essentially on their maximum terms. It was after the fears of escalation that McNamara expressed on October 27, which Blight cites, that RFK was sent by the President with his ultimatum to the Soviets. (It does seem likely that, because of their fears, this ultimatum was a bluff; but Khrushchev didn't know that, and he settled on the terms of the ultimatum).

Blight reasons throughout as if the concessions Kennedy included in his ultimatum--in particular, the assurance of a "private" trade of the Turkish missiles, not to be alluded to as part of a deal--were critical to the Soviets' acceptance. But Kennedy and McNamara didn't expect that, and virtually no analyst believes that today. The fact is that although the President--in light of his and McNamara's fears--was personally willing to go further, even on Saturday, October 27 (as earlier), to make a public trade--which McNamara had earlier identified as the least concession likely to be effective--he was persuaded not to act on these fears or willingness on that day, but to maintain a tough position.

It was Khrushchev's fears, not Kennedy's or McNamara's, that

led to the actual settlement, on Kennedy's tough terms: a clearcut defeat for the Soviets and victory for the Americans, not a "compromise." It was a "peaceful resolution" like the Versailles Treaty or the surrenders in World War II. (Given Castro's refusal of on-site inspection, the promise not to invade Cuba proved to be no more formal or reliable as a commitment than Castro had predicted).

The real lesson of the crisis is not that officials gradually learn the dangers of loss of control during the crisis and thus, at its climax, become cautious on both sides and end the crisis safely by mutual compromise, as Blight maintains.

It is that the crisis was precipitated as a physical, dangerous confrontation after and despite intense awareness at the highest levels of the risk of loss of control; and that despite the intensification of this awareness during the crisis, compromises believed to be essential to resolution without war were rejected or postponed while risky actions continued to be pursued (on both sides), till one side, not the other, abruptly and unpredictably surrendered.

If Khrushchev had, instead, held out, it does seem possible, even likely, that Kennedy would not have carried out his ultimatum. He might have intensified the blockade; but before long, he would probably have conceded on Khrushchev's terms, perhaps the very next day, Sunday, October 28. This inference is based on new evidence. That outcome would indeed have supported Blight's thesis.

(For that matter, Blight's argument does apply quite well--on the basis of my own interpretation of Khrushchev's motives in hastening to concede--to Khrushchev's actual behavior in ending the crisis, not to the Americans'. Blight has not modified his original manuscript to the point of exploiting these new data, or my thesis, on Soviet behavior.)

But the likelihood of Kennedy's going in that direction would have been sharply reduced if Castro had shot down low-level reconnaissance planes on Sunday. That would, instead, have likely begun a process of escalation. And Kennedy, despite his fears, had not called off such sorties for Sunday (though he did, finally, cancel both night reconnaissance and the U-2). It is this behavior, along with RFK's Saturday night ultimatum--which rejected the proposal of a public trade, at least temporarily, purporting to do so definitively--that contradicts Blight's thesis and his reassuring conclusion.

Ironically, in one major respect McNamara's and Kennedy's concern for loss of control (specifically, the possibility that a Soviet subordinate would launch a missile from Cuba under attack) did have a major moderating effect on their behavior, even larger than Blight ever recognizes. It now seems that they were preparing

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and at least strongly considering a possible invasion or air attack in the weeks before the missiles were discovered; and the discovery, and their fear of unauthorized Soviet launch under attack, actually led them (secretly even from the ExComm) to discard the practical notion of attacking or invading.

This is a dramatic support to Blight's thesis! (To mention it--as Blight does not--would involve suggesting that Kennedy and McNamara had been covertly contemplating and preparing clearcut aggression, and that they lied about it publicly, with McNamara still doing so, at Harvard.) And it does imply that the crisis was--because of their justified concern for loss of control--less dangerous than their public statements and preparations implied. It means that the latter amounted to bluffs.

But it is still not as reassuring as Blight suggests. Though they didn't attack immediately (and may have intended not to, ever), they did blockade, and they did send recon planes over, even after firing on them had commenced (e.g., in the afternoon of Saturday, after the U-2 had been destroyed and one low-level plane damaged in the morning).

The historical lesson is: Statesmen may get relatively cautious in the face of the possibility of losing control. (Relative, that is, to their own previous impulses, or to the recommendations of extreme hawks). But not cautious enough, to avoid major danger. Nor willing to lose the contest, nor to make compromises, promptly, that might be interpreted as defeat. They don't become safe. Nor does the nuclear era, in their care.

Nuclear weapons are not safely entrusted to them.

Wednesday, 4 October

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7 February 1989

Notes on Blight and Welch, On the Brink

1. How high was the danger of nuclear war during the crisis, and from what did it derive?

Opening sentence of McGeorge Bundy's foreward refers to "nuclear danger." Liner note by Strobe Talbott begins: "There is no doubt that the Cuban missile crisis was the closest that the United States and the Soviet Union have ever come to the brink of war." (Consider the scorn poured on Dulles for this phrase, in 1956--referring to a whole set of other incidents--by some of the very participants in this crisis: Nitze, Acheson...)

First back cover comment, by Richard Rhodes: "...the closest the world ever came to nuclear war."

Why, and in what sense, "closest"? How close? Was it a "nuclear crisis" at all?

How much of this sense of danger derives from false public impressions: 1) the sense that the installation could only be understood as preparation for a Soviet first strike, perhaps soon (fostered by JFK speech); 2) belief that it would make a Soviet first strike vastly more feasible, tempting, threatening; 3) belief that Castro might control the missiles, unpredictably; 4) expectation that any US non-nuclear attack on Cuba, or blockade incident, would likely lead to Soviet nuclear retaliation, perhaps all-out (Bertrand Russell, Szilard?); 5) related assumption that US deterrence was very unstable, that Soviets would be quick to retaliate to any pressure by nuclear first strike?

A basis for fear: both sides were taking actions that were predictably highly provocative to the other. And Khrushchev's were seen by Americans--what about perceptions elsewhere--as the more menacing and illegitimate. Though in legal terms, and in terms of a parity of rights and of American precedence, the Soviet actions were perfectly legal and equivalent to earlier American ones. (However, the secrecy of the Soviet actions and US assertions that the Soviets had been deceptive gave them a guilty and ominous look).

Note that mis-estimates of the risk of particular courses, of the probability of certain actions or responses by the adversary or allies, or of risk of the confrontation as a whole, whether over-estimates or under-estimates, could either raise the overall risk, or lower it! Likewise, biases in the estimate of risk, in either direction.

I.e., a high estimate (biased, or exaggerated: or well-founded) of a high could dispose one either to caution, rejection of a risky course or a search for alternatives, or to preemptive

action as a lesser evil... Confidence that the opponent will not act violently no matter what one does (Taylor, p. 138) could lead to very aggressive actions oneself; or to the lack of a feeling of threat, hence to lack of need to act violently.

How would a surprise attack (or, one with warning; or even after October 27 ultimatum) have differed from a limited preventive war, or preventive attack? How would it have differed from the Israeli attack on the Iraqi reactor? How can we say that US leaders never came close to considering seriously a preventive war when our rationale for this attack was a (furtive) Soviet attempt suddenly and unilaterally to change "the balance of power"? Why wouldn't this rationale apply equally well to a sudden, secret buildup of ICBMs in the Soviet Union? (Or China).

For the doves, the real reason for the "crisis" or "problem" was the commitment that JFK had made publicly, that we would take action if there was a buildup of offensive weapons (without having, at the time, given a rationale for why we would regard this so seriously; the real reason having been that the Republicans wanted us to invade anyway, and to stop the Soviet aid, and that this tough talk was a substitute for acting more aggressively in September). I.e., this was no indication of how we would have behaved and planned in the event of a Soviet buildup, against which we had made no such public threats.

Nevertheless, the publicly-offered rationale was that of the need for a preventive attack, if the objectionable missiles were not removed by the Soviets (with no consideration of an "arms control" approach in which both sides made concessions and approached stability by removing or averting comparable threatening elements) (such an approach would have implied diplomatic parity; and as the Soviets see it, the US considered such an admission only after the Soviets had bought military parity. Are they wrong, in their causal inference? Was it worth it?

Chomsky sees such US demands as piracy, lawless vigilantism. Most members of the elite see it as being a Free World policeman, or, more privately, exercising the responsibilities (and rights) of being a Great Power (certainly, in our "traditional sphere") and of being the Good Guys, representing Light against the forces of Darkness (Nixon, Reagan), with a double standard more or less explicitly applying to the means allowable to the two sides (i.e., it is all right, being well intended, serving good, and being necessary, for us to make threats and attacks and demands that are wrong when the Soviets do what appears to be the same).

As Chomsky does point out, the Soviets see it much the same way, reversed; except that in external relations, they were then trying to establish a global symmetry, not to maintain or achieve a superior status.

✓ McN admits that a US president--not Kennedy, not with McN to advise him?--might impulsively, in a crisis, have ordered preemption if he feared that the Soviets were about to strike, in order to limit damage (a goal McN gave credence to at least into 1964, if not later). Surely this was more likely for Kennedy in 1962 than later, despite Kennedy's caution, given the capabilities on both sides. Moreover, McN says that he could imagine a real possibility of Soviet preemption--in view of the appearance of the alert that SAC had actually instituted--and worried about this during the crisis. (This is news; he admits that the opposite impression might have prevailed).

Given this, did not the alert offer real risks? What else could possibly have triggered Soviet attack (about which, to repeat, McN actually worried: perhaps realistically, though I would not have said so at the time). In the event, however, the Soviets lay very low, walked very cautiously, did not go on alert at all, as Dave Burchinal probably expected. Thus, the SAC alert did reduce the risks of nuclear war through Soviet preemption, false alarm, or unauthorized action.

However, suppose the Soviets had behaved otherwise, understandably, and gone on a high alert (if they were at all capable of this). This would have caused apprehension, of a sort, at SAC and NORAD; and McNamara, apparently, was a SecDef who would not have felt that Soviet preemption--totally irrational though it would have been--was out of the question, totally implausible under the crisis circumstances. Suppose there had been, in addition, indications that Soviet preemption--perhaps out of very plausible fear of US preemption or preventive attack (e.g., to accompany US attack on Cuba, in expectation, which did exist, of a strong Soviet response, and to forestall Soviet attainment of a higher level of alert).

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What would McNamara have advised the President? Would he really want to wait till bombs had exploded on the US? Would he not at least entertain discussion of preemption? Would he not have taken this thought significantly more seriously than he would have in, say, 1967? And if not: would he believe that this would be equally true of any President and of "sane" Secretaries of Defense other than himself, e.g., Nitze, Dillon, Taylor, Weinberger, Laird (who called for superiority), etc.? I.e., that damage-limiting on the scale available in 1962 would offer no incentive to preempt (and thus put pressure on the Soviets to preempt, if they had more capability to do so than in 1962) under conditions of Soviet readiness and of crisis like 1962 (which could have arisen in 1973, or perhaps in Syria 1983 or the Persian Gulf 1987, or over a blockade of Cuba by Haig in 1981)? (Granted, the same opportunities for damage-limiting will never return; but if McNamara could even imagine Khrushchev in 1962 acting that impulsively (as Rusk did, too), why not later US leaders, with first-strike offering a greater differential over

Cheney
Rumsfeld

second-strike than was true for him?)

According to B and W, 205, "the ExComm's assessments of Soviet actions...were clearly fundamental to their assessments of the risk of nuclear war (for neither hawks nor doves in the ExComm suggested that it would have been wise or necessary for the United States to initiate nuclear war, though there, of course, some possibility that a breakdown of command and control or an accident of some kind might have resulted in an advertent use of an American nuclear weapon)."

Can it be that nowhere in this book is there acknowledgement of the possibility (or prospect, in Soviet eyes) of US first use--over Berlin, or Turkey?! Or of deliberate, Presidential preemption, except for McNamara's hypothetical mention of some President, though he denies the possibility for Cuba II (see the conflicting statements at top and bottom of p. 199)? Is this the unacknowledgeable possible route to nuclear war? Granted what McNamara reveals about his own commitments, and what he believes of the President: were these thoroughly reliable under all circumstances that might have arisen? And what if others had held these posts? (See Bobby Kennedy's comment).

What kind of "craziness, irrationality" was called for, to get nuclear weapons to explode? (e.g., as the basis for the hawks' residual fears: far from infinitesimal (207)!) Was it not of the same order as was amply exhibited among American officials on the ExComm--presumably available on both sides! (i.e., not merely hypothetical, a paranoid worry about possible Soviets).

E.g., a willingness, for limited purposes, to take actions with a 10% chance of leading to nuclear war! (Nitze). Or feeling certain (Dillon) that the other side would not be crazy enough to respond, from a position of strategic inferiority, to an attack on its forces. Or waking up to find it "interesting" still to be alive (Rusk) after endorsing the blockade; likewise (Ball and McNamara) not to be sure that they would see another Sunday, given the course they had proposed. *Saturday*

See the very limited, "economist's" definition of irrationality cited from Schelling, (216), which leaves out "crazy, inhumane, unreasonable" payoff functions or priorities (which may still be consistent and orderly), and perceptual and ideological bias, and crazy "models" of inference. (It emphasizes inconsistency and disorderly procedures as forms of irrationality).
2. Still missing from revelations, memories: Nitze's and Rusk's reactions (omissions in B and W interview? p. 139-40) to first news of missiles! Nitze either doesn't remember, conceals it, or his reply is censored in B/W. "We would have to eat these; they were legal, there was precedent, there was nothing we could do."

X But when President--who had not been alerted the night before (apparently, against advice of Rusk to Bundy!), so had had no time for reflection before first meetings--felt the political heat, as did RFK (memory of Cline? and Hyland?) and perhaps also felt angry at having been deceived and having made himself vulnerable with public assurances and public threats (though perhaps he had deceived himself, in large part, in interpreting deliberately ambiguous Soviet statements)--said, "The missiles have to go," that redefined the situation for Nitze and Rusk.

How reluctant were they to shift perspective? Were they happy to see the US take the risks (which Nitze remembers now as seeming very low to him--10% at the time!) (compare the range of estimates over atmospheric ignition!) so long as the President took the responsibility? But Rusk thought risks were higher; so did the President, as it happens. ? NO

Dillon says he never heard anyone question the unanimous, immediate premise that those missiles had to come out, by whatever means necessary.)165) But this was not the initial reaction of Nitze or Rusk (or, I suspect McNamara) the night before; it was laid down by the President. The failure to question it was simply the unwillingness of anyone to challenge the President's firm premise, even at these stakes.

No one--except perhaps Acheson--treated their own careers and access to the President as expendable. No one acted as I did in October 1969. No one treated any of the courses in question as having the nature Konrad Kellen described: "There are certain things that, unless you must do them, you must not do them." In law, this is like saying: Only a clearcut necessity defense can justify this. Concretely: This--normally illegal--action is justified only if it is the only way to save human lives from imminent (or otherwise sure?) harm.

Violent courses, including the blockade, did not meet this test in Cuba II--though the public was at first encouraged to believe they did. Nitze and others suppress to this day information on their own initial assessments, which would reveal that they did not regard the Soviet deployment as either illegal or necessary to reverse: hence, as justifiable to reverse by violent, otherwise illegal means.

No one challenged the President's initial, impulsive assessment that the missiles were "unacceptable," and ever since, both doves and hawks have endorsed that premise (differing, in some cases importantly, on how to have achieved it). And no one said: What you are doing is so wrongheaded, immoral, dangerous, that I cannot be party to it. Still less: ...I will not keep my promise of confidentiality; Congress, the public, the UN, whoever I can mobilize into effective resistance, must be alerted to what is being contemplated.

Actually, hawks seemed more likely to react this way. McCone had probably been leaking earlier to Keating (and, suspected of this, was cut out of the private Fomin-Scali dealings, and not, apparently, told of RFK's dealings with Dobrynin; nor would he have been told of the JFK-Cordier-U Thant link if that had been used).

Acheson withdrew from the proceedings when his airstrike advice was not followed. (He didn't approve of the ExComm format anyway: too large, too inclusive, especially of "moralists"). Dillon was shocked and depressed when he heard of the President's readiness to trade the Turkish missiles (as I was when I inferred it Saturday night); he might have reacted strongly if he had known at the time, which is why he wasn't told. (I went along, most reluctantly and inefficiently; but I decided never to come back to Washington).

For many of these people, being selected for the ExComm meant the apex of their careers in terms of inclusion in the circle around the President and closeness to the President on important decisions. It was "unthinkable" to them that they should sacrifice that. (Neither of these applied to Acheson).

(b) Nitze's actual estimate at the time of the risk of nuclear war: 10%, "fairly high...and I was low man in the ExComm." Others? (Blight and Welch should have asked for odds, and perceptions of others' odds.)

c) secret till 1987, still not emphasized: JFK's attitude on morning of Oct 27 (or before): willingness to trade, accept parity--even "under the (defensive, deterrent!) gun," even as a backdown from a belligerent, aggressive position that implied US superiority of strength and right, at the outset.

3. Contrary to McGeorge Bundy, and to what he presumes about me, I can live with cognitive dissonance (without reinterpreting evidence or restructuring theories so as to resolve it, prematurely or unrealistically). Thus, I can admit that Nitze, not McNamara, is right: that the strategic balance makes a difference, in various ways (including the ways the hawks think), and that first-use threats can work, and that the risk of nuclear war (Soviet escalation) was lower than the President thought it was. K JFK

And yet I can still think (like Garthoff, who put the risk still lower--too low, I would say) that the risks (which I now put higher than I thought then) were not worth taking, and that Nitze's proposals were far too reckless. (I.e., the strategic balance didn't make enough difference in this case, and the first-use threats might not work, and escalation was too risky.) $\frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{2}$

I pretty much held Nitze's views at the time, except much lower sense of risk (like Garthoff); though I didn't think actual attack was necessary, or desirable.

My disagreement with McNamara or with Bundy is with their extreme position, such as Bundy's 1969 statement (Foreign Affairs) that the outcome would have been the same (US demands would have been as aggressive, threats as credible, likelihood of carrying out threats no less) if the huge strategic imbalance had been reversed. I don't think parity would have made much difference; and as Bundy says, there is a broad band of parity.

But if Soviet conventional superiority elsewhere had been accompanied by huge strategic Soviet superiority (the counterpart to our ^{strat.} position with respect to Quemoy, or perhaps Berlin) then our conventional superiority in the Caribbean would not have encouraged us, I think, to press such outrageous, illegal, aggressive demands, or to win acceptance of them, any more than Soviets could have done so to keep missiles out of Turkey in 1962.

What vast superiority did for the US in 1962 (and in 1961, and in Quemoy, 1955 and 1958, and Korea 1953) was to make it at least slightly credible that the US would carry out a first-use threat of limited, tactical nuclear strikes "if necessary" in maintaining access to West Berlin (as General Graham said he would, even today) or in response to conflict in the Middle East stemming from Soviet strikes on Turkish missiles. Thus these Soviet counterthreats were not sufficiently credible to deter us from conventional attacks in the Caribbean, even aggressive ones (in "our own backyard").

Thus, what vast (and unmatched in the future) superiority did for us in 1962 was to (1) maintain the denial of effective military parity and hence of diplomatic parity with the Soviets, and (2) prevent the establishment of an important kind of military parity in the short run, and (3) prevent the creation of effective deterrence of US aggression against Cuba. All of these were achieved by means of warlike, illegal, aggressive military actions and threats.

What this superiority had given us in 1961 was the ability to protect West Berlin by "military" means--of a terroristic nature (nuclear first use), rather than by diplomatic and trade arrangements, as after 1971.

One can say--as I do--that the strategic balance can make a difference, can matter to the outcome of certain tactics in pursuit of certain aims--yet believe these tactics are illegitimate (immoral, too reckless, illegal) and the aims are, likewise, illegitimate and unnecessary (or, to the extent that they are legitimate and worthwhile, could be achieved by other means, to which the balance is irrelevant.

are without expressing judgments that the opposition feels, with good reason, are absurd, ideologically, wildly unrealistic, (like: war was unjustified for allies) (as - what? non-resistance?)

Thus, the balance--and its effect on the credibility of first-use threats--would not have been of any effect or relevance in our pursuit of legitimate foreign policy ends by legitimate, appropriate and adequate means. Where it was relevant and effective was in our pursuit of what Khrushchev accurately described as piratical behavior.

4. (Wednesday, 8 February) See (1): why was the crisis dangerous?

1973? (a) For the first time in the postwar era (17 years old) one superpower was threatening--and preparing, both publicly and privately--imminent attack on the weapons and troops of the other.

This situation could have arisen the year earlier if Khrushchev had carried out his threat to turn control of access to Berlin over to the East Germans, and if they had then blocked access, with Soviet military support.

In the case of Berlin, the Soviet move would have violated US legal rights of access, and in doing so, have threatened the liberty of the West Berliners. In Cuba, the Soviet move was itself legal--by all norms of international law, as well as by US precedent--and would have "violated" only our big-power "rights" of illegal aggression and domination in "our sphere." (But this was predictably "provocative" of an illegal, aggressive reaction from the US, and therefore highly reckless of Khrushchev; his apparent confidence that it was safe probably rested not on an assessment that Kennedy was creditably law-abiding as that he was weak, indecisive, cowardly.)

Thus there was an imminent prospect of large, perhaps unlimited, conventional conflict between the superpowers: assuming the possibility and likelihood of "horizontal escalation" by the Soviets beyond the Caribbean. (This was expected by the intelligence community, as reflected in a SNIE, as well as by doves on the ExComm, and by the public. Only hawks, perhaps including myself, discounted this).

b) There was also a link to possible nuclear war, via Soviet responses against Berlin or Turkish missiles. (Nitze, the Berlin specialist, thought a move against Turkey more likely, though it still made no sense; Dillon, the other civilian hawk, thought the reverse.)

Again, the burden of this escalation--to nuclear war--was on the US (not in the Caribbean, but in the event of Soviet challenges elsewhere).

From McNamara's point of view (B/W

2) hopes it won't -- misson (for "over-optimistic" misson)
like sanctifying warheads, and
c) keeping the secret!

5. Each member of the ExComm (and from what we know, the Soviets) exhibited elements of both realistic shrewdness and courage, on the one hand, and madness, ignorant stupidity, or cowardice on the other. Virtually every one expressed some judgments that seemed relatively more realistic and judicious than those of his colleagues; and others that seem sharply inconsistent or crazily detached from reality or extreme and reckless, along, in all cases, with a willingness to go along with group or Presidential decisions from which the individual radically dissented.

In virtually every case, one can reasonably infer from the record that each individual could have, in certain circumstances, initiated nuclear war--or if not that (say, in the case of McNamara) launched major war with a recognized potential for "inadvertent" escalation to nuclear war--or at least (say, Ball) have gone along with such a decision without dissociating himself, blocking or exposing it.

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gone* That is, one cannot infer (even of the doves) that any one of these individuals "could not, under any circumstances, have taken actions that he recognized as raising the risks of nuclear war." None of them was a clear, reliable circuit-breaker on the way to nuclear war, still less on the way to major non-nuclear war.

What the world should have learned from this episode was close to its most extreme, fearful fantasies: that the fate of humanity rested on a dozen men in each capital who were playing poker with others' lives as stakes: and playing it the way men usually play poker, with a lively concern for their own prestige and sense of manliness. (Strip poker risks one's own shame, exposure; this would be closer to rape poker, murder poker, where what one stakes is a willingness, presumably reluctantly, to commit crimes. In this case, the player whose bet (threat) was called would have to commit mass murder--initially non-nuclear, eventually, if the betting went high enough, nuclear--possibly combined, in the latter case, with suicide: or else, an alternative stake, accept extreme humiliation and probably loss of power.

*it
was!* Both Khrushchev (who did choose the latter, over calling Kennedy's bluff--if it was bluff) and Kennedy may have preferred their own defeat and humiliation to mass killing. But not enough to stop the bidding on Saturday; and one of the random elements in this game was the possibility that subordinate elements in their respective power structures might force their hand, as began to happen.

Both the possibility of "inadvertence"--loss of control by the leaders of subordinates or allies, actions taken on the basis of misunderstanding or false information--and of reckless or

realistically possible in the opponent, should be at least hypothesized for one's own side: and vice versa.

JFK and Rusk seem to have followed this rule; they saw a problem on both sides: though they were part of the problem on the US side, not relatively to the hawks, but even in their "moderate, dovish" courses they favored or accepted, and in accepting the premise that the missiles must go.

Some forms of madness:

1) (Hawks) Mad assurance that the other side (a) acts rationally, in a predictable, reasonable way, no matter what the pressures and circumstances; (b) its leaders are in absolute control of subordinates and allies; (c) thus, it will not respond to attacks--when the balance of forces offers no reasonable hope of success (and its leaders will not be tempted by unreasonable, wishful hopes)--no matter how punishing and humiliating these might be.

McG B

(These suppositions all violate the Rule of Reason, or Unreason: none of these traits would be attributed to Americans, but Bolsheviks are supposed to be inhumanly different. (This attitude was encouraged by Nathan Leites' distillation of inspirational admonitions Bolsheviks write to or about themselves: masturbation tracts for apparatchiks.)

Thus: the US can afford to act unreasonably, destructively, illegally, immorally, arrogantly, with safety: so long as the balance of forces favors it militarily.

But then: Why did Khrushchev, in a very inferior position militarily both locally in the Caribbean and in nuclear strategic terms, make such a provocative move?

Because, the hawks say, he was betting--on plausible evidence--that Kennedy lacked the will to rely on his superiorities, to take even small risks of war. Since they had a lot to gain if they got away with it, and saw the risk as small: they were smart to try to deploy the missiles; smart to take them out, when they saw their gamble had failed; and smart enough not to have reacted if we had hit the missiles before they took them out. (Why then did the hawks prefer airstrike, if they could have foreseen that the Soviets were cool enough to remove the missiles when they saw that Kennedy was willing to claim a right to go to war, to wage an act of war in the form of the blockade, and to make every plausible preparation for war? If the Soviets could "accept" an airstrike, why wouldn't they back down to a blockade? Why did the hawks think the blockade wasn't working, on the 26th? Didn't that worry them about their fundamental assessment? Or, if it was working, but just needed more time, why press to move on to airstrike? (Dillon says, concern that missiles were becoming operational; but were they not operational already? or thought to be?)

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JFK &
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crew
could

2) Mad willingness to follow a course of action that involved an avoidable risk of nuclear war on the level of 10%, or 1/3--1/2, or indeed 1% (Bundy). To prolong such a risk by a day: as both Kennedy and Khrushchev chose to do on Saturday, when the risk of loss of control had been demonstrated concretely by that morning. To raise the risk by such an amount, for political ends.

3) To define the deployment of missiles to Cuba as "unacceptable," "intolerable" (see Church on the Soviet brigade in Cuba, 1979)--i.e., to commit the US to "pay any cost, accept any risk, inflict any damage" necessary to eliminate it, "by any means necessary"; and to refuse or fail to reexamine or modify this premise on reflection, as the prospective requirements mounted up. (see unconditional surrender in WWII; goals in Vietnam).

Especially, to accept the President's definition of this, when it contradicted the more reasonable intuition of Rusk and Nitze at first hearing of the missiles (surely in line with McNamara, Gilpatric, and Ball: four doves and one hawk, all the top officials of Defense and State!). They were right, non-mad: except in their subsequent acquiescence! (I.e., it had to be recognized that Khrushchev had chosen a good move, good for him, based squarely on American precedent, which the Americans could not counter except with gross illegality and great, disproportionate risk, or with major concessions to the Soviets. The only flaw was that enough Americans--starting with the President--were mad and reckless and unrestrained by law or precedent or diplomatic parity, believed that might made right, and were angry, and given a color of righteousness, by the secretive tactics Khrushchev had followed.)

4) It is mad--but "human," i.e. a normal madness of men in power--to be willing (as Kahneman and Tversky suggest) generally to define as "unacceptable" in these senses, a sure, short-run humiliation, failure, defeat, posing loss of power and office or of leadership in an Administration or an alliance, or threatening the coherence, morale, integrity of a group or alliance: preferring instead, war, or generally, great (disproportionate--by any other's standards) risks of catastrophe, even of nuclear war.

(Both JFK and Khrushchev showed an ultimate non-madness, in their willingness to contemplate or accept a humiliating backdown rather than carry out their threats of war. Yet each of them, as mentioned above, postponed that backdown for at least a day as of Saturday morning, 27 October, prolonging a significant risk of a loss of control that would lower their chances to avert war: postponed it, truly, long enough that war might really have occurred, given possible, even probable, additional events not subject to their control (Castro's shooting down more reconnaissance planes).

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Moreover, Kennedy kept his own sanity a super-secret from most of his own ExComm, for fear that it would leak to the hawks and

destructive actions by superiors (Nye ignores this, but Rusk clearly feared it in the Soviets, and Ball and others saw the influence on US leaders, and perhaps Soviets, of wild hawks) meant that "irrational" courses were real possibilities on either side: and thus, contrary to McNamara, credible and possibly effective threats, making even nuclear weapons "usable."

The actual ending of the crisis, and the US success, does confirm the hawk estimate of the potential effectiveness of both nuclear and non-nuclear threats (and the advantage of extreme strategic superiority, over either parity or inferiority: note Dillon's statement that under present conditions of parity, his position would have been like McNamara's). But this potential and advantage rests precisely on the known and real existence of traits of "madness" in representative leaders and their advisors; such a power--with its dangers for humanity--is not limited to leaders like Hitler or Stalin, or ruling circles like the Nazis.

As Rusk both understood--and exhibited himself, both in Cuba II and later in Vietnam--the "normal," predictable, traits of men in power provide a basis for effective, credible threats of mad, irrational, wildly reckless and immoral, destructive behavior, and for realistic public apprehension that such threats will be challenged by others and may be carried out.

(on a smaller scale, see the behavior of the four participants, including myself, and the attitudes expressed, in the Kwitny panel!) (As RK says: "Men are strange.")

I said to Bundy, about his advice on Rolling Thunder: There was a strangeness to that decision (and advice). That was true of the decision-making on both sides in Cuba II. Nor were lessons learned that led to markedly more realistic and prudent behavior afterwards: Vietnam (and DomRep) followed just two years later, for the US (with the Brezhnev buildup in the SU); more recently, Reagan... (Vietnam did lead to some useful learning, but it was overcome among the elite, though not yet, entirely, in the public).

The ominous lessons to be learned (from the secret record, just now beginning to come out) from Cuba II remain pertinent: about the Political Uses of Madness (see the learning by Nixon and HAK!) and its dangers for human survival.

(See the assumptions of madness that Nitze's hypothesized dangers and opportunities rest on; and the madness of Nitze's confidence that leaders on both sides will, in fact, act rationally by his standards).

6. A rule of reason: A Rule of Unreason: Realistic Mirror Imaging of Irrationality. Any attributions of possible irrationality, impulsiveness, loss of control, unreason, that are seen as

thence to the military and Congress and public and discredit him or cause effective revolt. (Note my own emotional reaction, and Dillon's; and the actual mood in the Pentagon even after the victory). In the country of the mad, the sane man is in danger.

5) Even if the Soviets had not reacted elsewhere: the hawks madly underestimated (1) the prospect that an American airstrike would have to be, or would be, followed by invasion of Cuba (the same blindness occurred two years later in Vietnam); (2) the actual costs and prospects of a war in Cuba (much less realistically estimated than in Vietnam, 1965). (Dillon feared the latter, and Taylor too--as in Vietnam--yet, as in Vietnam, he favored the airstrike).

6) (a form of madness): Where the ideological paradigm defines a certain, short-run outcome as a humiliating and costly failure; but where it can be averted only by a course with high risks of absolute catastrophe; the male, organized power system fails to reexamine the ideological premises, to attempt to "re-frame" the perceptions, to reconsider the paradigm or entertain competing paradigms: or to challenge authority. ("There is no time for that; this is not the time...for sophomoric bull sessions, considerations of 'morality' (Nitze)

This leaves it to the Authority himself to do so, if able; Kennedy alone, on the 27th and apparently earlier, entertains such notions (of accepting a new parity of status and entitlement with the Soviets, of willingness to negotiate and trade; but no one joins him, he is argued down, led away from heresy, though he secretly determines to reconsider on the next day. Likewise, perhaps, Stevenson: who is destroyed afterwards for his heresy. (Thus, the President and Nitze exchanged positions, from their initial reactions to their final views; yet Nitze's final view--the President's initial one, the missiles must go without a public trade, by military pressure, as much as necessary--remained relevant to the President. McNamara thinks JFK could not have gone for the public trade, after initially defining the situation as he did; thinks he would have kept up pressure of blockade (193), lest he risk "impeachment". (The pressure from the military and civilian hawks would have threatened near-revolt; see my own emotional reaction, and that of Dillon retrospectively, 171). Yet, in deprecating the chance that he would have moved to invade, is McNamara reconsidering his impression of the time in light of the information that RFK may have, as he says, delivered an ultimatum? Would that not have influenced the President, even if he had not authorised such language, as McNamara speculates? And what if more recon planes had been shot down, as the blockade was tightened?

Would the public really have reacted that badly, after the tension of the crisis? See the public relief when Unconditional Surrender was abandoned (after Hiroshima), despite White House

apprehension. And the happiness that we were out of Vietnam, both in October 1972, March 1973 and May 1975, after a generation of apprehension about this. (with no "morning after" for Ford).

Thus, where the destruction of the Northern Hemisphere can be averted only by the abandonment of the ruling paradigm, bet on the destruction of the Hemisphere.

7. I suspect that when Kennedy apologists (Kennedy School political scientists) hear me pursue, critically, Kennedy's prolongation of the risks of a confrontation he should never have launched, they feel impatient, put upon, sense that I am stretching perversely to be critical and dismissive.

After all, I sense they feel, look at the criticisms Kennedy's policy gets from the Right (about which, I suspect, their feelings and their responses are different). Don't these cancel out, or invalidate, the criticisms that are raised from the left, from the doves?

Isn't it clear that his position was centrist, moderate: that he used his power, creditably, to resist powerful pressures to act more violently, dangerously, that others in his position would probably have been more precipitate and less successful, that he chose goals as modest and means as prudent as he could "afford"--without risking impeachment? (This may have been his own assessment, as expressed to his brother).

This response--if I am not just imagining it--reflects a half-conscious assessment that the views of the Right, the hawks, require to be taken specially seriously as a political factor, by Presidents and by observers. This is not because "the truth," or appropriate policy, generally lies somewhere midway between the views of Left and Right; but because the Right is powerful disproportionately to its numbers: well-financed, strongly represented (if a minority) in the media and the Establishment, and with a strong institutional base within the government itself, in particular in the military and perhaps in the operational wing of the intelligence community.

Thus their views are weightier, politically, than the legalistic or moralistic or "radical" objections to policy that may be raised by "liberals" (now seen as "the left", with genuine radicals an almost-unheard fringe) or even the fears and frustrations of the mass public. Supporters of the Presidency or of particular Presidents are likely to give them great credit--to feel, really, that they deserve immunity from "liberal/left" criticism--because of the courage they have shown in resisting the precise, extreme demands and policy recommendations of the military and the Right. The Presidents themselves and their close advisors

commonly feel--for the rest of their lives--that such criticism is misguided, ethically irrelevant, unfair, for this reason.

There is even some truth to this judgment. Yet it accepts too quickly that a course which is significantly less dangerous or brutal or lawless than that advocated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff or certain "hardnosed" civilians is, by the same token, "moderate" in the sense of adequately wise, prudent, moral, safe: when it may be only a slightly less precipitous road to hell.
(See my Note on the Restrained Race to Oblivion).

To praise as "moderate, cautious" the simple rejection of certain extreme, radical militarist courses that should scarcely be regarded as legitimate policy "options"--proposals that ought to disbar their advocates from any further participation in serious policymaking--is to collaborate in the dismissal of all moral, legal, and constitutional restraints from consideration in high-level national security policymaking.

^{McG B}
The common rejection of such proposals--not, unfortunately, all of them--by Presidents should not exempt them or their advisors from critical scrutiny of the "compromises" they adopt instead. (Though it is also true that such criticism should take account of the actual pressures they were experiencing to do even worse than they did; nor should it be based on the naive presumption that others in their place would with high likelihood have responded to such pressures better, simply because the circumstances "demanded" it).

8. Some "ironies," bases for regret (in some cases, shame), in my own career (comparable, in the shameful cases, to the "irony" that Burlatsky, who now reveals that changing the strategic balance was perhaps the main objective of the missile deployment, was the drafter of Khrushchev's speech of December 1962 to the Supreme Soviet which declared that defending Cuba was the sole and only purpose; or in the ironic cases, comparable to the fact that Khrushchev, in attempting to defend Cuba, justified and almost brought on an invasion of Cuba, or that Kennedy, concerned that the deployment of missiles might lead to the loss of Berlin, planned and threatened and almost carried out measures that, he himself thought, might well have led to Soviet takeover of Berlin):

--My BNSP turned out to have been a first-strike plan (given the non-existence of Soviet first-strike forces); and it became the basis for Nitze's model for the Soviet FS-strike plan, the core of his "window of vulnerability", which rationalised a vast and destabilizing buildup of US first-strike forces while rejecting arms control negotiations; and it was the basis for Weinberger's protracted war plans.

--My last draft of the Ann Arbor speech (which I did advise against strongly) was a political and diplomatic disaster, helped push the French out of the Alliance and encourage them to veto the UK from the Common Market.

--My Gilpatric speech did end the Berlin Crisis in 1961, but helped drive Khrushchev toward the Cuban Missile Crisis, both in its substantive political import and, probably (I never thought of this before, in humiliating and enraging Khrushchev and perhaps Malinovsky, who later participated in the deployment decision).

--The Kennedy defense speech I proposed in 1959 led toward the conventional buildup that permitted the threats in the Cuban Crisis and, more importantly, Vietnam.

--I drafted a speech (not given, and I didn't believe in it) that cynically explained our open-ended involvement as the containment of China; I collaborated on a policy that I didn't agree with, that was the irreversible step toward catastrophe.

--I helped McNamara with a rationale to persuade the President to start Rolling Thunder after Qui Nhon, a policy I thought morally and practically disastrous. McNamara was successful, and I was right.

--I had, on the other hand, the greatest resistance--yet I cooperated, on request, though so inefficiently that I was bypassed--to Kennedy's prudent decision to defuse the Turkish missiles and prepare to remove them, to avert escalation in Cuba II.

8. More on why there was a crisis, and what its risks were.

Was the Soviet secrecy and deceit critical to the US crisis reaction? Bundy and Sorensen suggest yes, though the Soviets seem not to have considered this strongly. But surely an open announcement of a Soviet decision to deploy missiles, at the request of the Cubans, might have led, still, to a US decision to blockade, and perhaps even to threaten airstrike or invasion: as the US has been saying for years about the prospect of Soviet Migs in Nicaragua, with almost no internal criticism of these threats.

from memo!

This latter policy suggests that the same steps might well have been taken even against Soviet short-range nuclear weapons, or a small and limited number of MRBMs. After all, Nixon--who had just been narrowly defeated for President, and was running for governor of California--was recommending a blockade at the time against Soviet defensive non-nuclear weapons.

By what right would we do this? We would say, the Monroe Doctrine: but that would raise the whole question of our attitude to postwar "spheres of influence." Our "traditional, special relation to Cuba and the Caribbean"? That really refers to the Platt Amendment, which precisely expresses our preferred relationship to Cuba, and its very limited sovereignty. (It is, indeed, like the Soviet Union's relation to Finland, an analogy on which Bundy actually relied.)

But had this changed in 1959, or not? Did Cuba have the right to change it: to claim full independence, with all rights of sovereignty, including defensive alliances and trading partners of its own choice? Or not? Did the US accept this change as legitimate, permanent, irreversible by US violent means, covert or overt? No, it did not (in secret): none of those.

The refusal to recognize a permanent or legitimate change in relationship was not limited to the White House; it was widely held by Republicans, Congress and the public (comparably to feelings about Panama, and perhaps--we shall soon see--the Philippines).

Thus, the Soviets and Cubans were acting a little soon to consolidate an unwanted and resisted change in a "traditional" hierarchical (imperial) relationship, in a particularly dramatic and provocative way. But (unknown to the US public) they didn't have time to wait, if they were to avert possible success a violent counterrevolutionary and counter-independence US rollback campaign.

Kennedy may not have had a definite intent, determination, to invade if necessary, or to have made such a decision. But far from ruling out such a course--as most Americans would have supposed, before the Bay of Pigs and again, after its failure--he had directed high-level preparation for quick implementation of such a decision if he were to come to it, precisely for the fall of 1962 (as Khrushchev feared, perhaps exaggerating its inevitability).

And the possibility that he would come to it, because success of his larger intention depended on it, was foreseen by Taylor, soon to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, in May, 1962 (about the time Khrushchev decided on his deterrent move). ?

What Kennedy had decided--in great secrecy from the American public, which would have been astounded to know it after the Bay of Pigs--was to accomplish the overthrow of the Castro regime, if possible by a vast covert campaign. And US intervention was by no means ruled out, if necessary--as the planners assumed with near certainty that it would be (just as they expected US intervention to be necessary to achieve Presidential goals in Vietnam, from 1961 on)--though the President was (perhaps) not committed to this further step.

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 To say, as McNamara did in Cambridge, that the US had no plan to invade--in the sense of a contingency plan, up to date and with full preparations to implement on Presidential order--is simply false. To say, as he then modified his position, that there was no intent--suggesting that there was a definite intent not to carry out such a plan (as may have been true, in his own mind at least, with respect to first-use nuclear planning)--is also untrue or misleading. What might be more correct would be to say: No intent to do it unless necessary--unless Mongoose proved inadequate without it (which was almost certain)--and perhaps not, perhaps even probably not, even then.

*I think
 as of
 Oct 21.
 5, Oct 18:*

9. Suppose the Soviets had taken comparable measures to resist the deployment of US missiles to Turkey--in the same year, 1962, when these were deployed! Blockade, if feasible; threats or implementation of air attack (like the Israeli raid on Iraq, or what Kennedy first envisioned for Cuba); invasion.

The only difference would be the lack of a "traditional" hierarchical relation to Turkey: which the US did not rely on in its public rationale or in the UN! And suppose, despite that absence, the Soviets claimed--perhaps quite sincerely--a wholly comparable outrage at this presumption by the other superpower and the nature of the "defenses" its neighbor was presuming to install on its borders. (After all, Turkey could hardly claim to feel a need for defense or deterrence comparable to what Cuba could, after the Bay of Pigs, even in the absence of public knowledge of Mongoose).

Why did this not happen? Was it not, in combination:

a) This is really outrageously illegal, in the postwar, UN Charter era, an assertion of sphere of influence Great Power claims that are supposed to be outmoded, a unilateral military assertion of might. (Unless the country in question could plausibly claim its security was sharply and immediately threatened, a supreme national emergency; but this would imply a belief either that one would immediately be attacked--which neither power claimed--or that it would be the basis for prompt aggression elsewhere in the world. The US did hint at this--and perhaps believed it with respect to Berlin (the strongest case for the Kennedy policy, somewhat encouraged by Soviet hints in 1962 and the ultimatum of 1961)--but on what basis?)

How, after all, was the balance of power to be changed? 48² missiles would make only a marginal difference: looking not just at overall numbers but at capabilities (even though it was a large proportional difference in capability; the Soviet capability started so close to zero).

But a much larger number of missiles, which was physically possible in a short time, would have made a major difference. Not in Soviet second-strike capability; the missiles in Cuba would have

been highly vulnerable. But they would have had, for the first time (and last time!) a good first-strike capability, comparable to ours. Our second-strike capability (in submarines) would have remained large, much larger than the Soviets'; still, there would have been a rough equality in first-strike, damage-limiting capability (enough for each side to have a real incentive to strike first if it anticipated a high likelihood of being struck soon). This would be a situation unstable in crises, to a degree never since achieved (but which might come into existence, for the first time, in the late 90's, with SDI as well as D5, ASW, and barrage capability against mobile missiles).

In 1962, such a situation would have been sharply, relatively, inhibiting to the credibility of US first-use nuclear threats, in Europe (as over Berlin) or elsewhere. This would be in addition to its deterrent effect--primarily by the threat of unauthorized local initiation under attack--to invasion or attack on Cuba.

Moreover, it would symbolise the arrival of true military parity, underpinning the ability of the Soviets to use such menacing means to consolidate a change, a setback, in US imperial relationships.

What the Soviet move could have meant (on a large scale) was not, as Collingwood said in 1962 (B/W 22), the ability to neutralize US retaliatory ability to destroy the Soviets, but enough damage-limiting capability to make a Soviet preemptive (not preventive) strike credible, if the US gave the Soviets reason to fear they were about to be struck. This would newly inhibit US escalation of a "limited" nuclear war; hence, it would inhibit US first-use, since without a credible US threat to escalate in response to Soviet retaliatory second-use, the first-use would appear too likely to lead to an ineffective, highly dangerous and destructive mutual exchange (even if it might remain limited to a localized region).

on US
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removal of US imperial control

What would be threatened, in the first instance, would be US domination ("protection") of its extended, global sphere of influence and its commercial and strategic interests therein, insofar as these rested on US threats to initiate nuclear war: not, immediately (or perhaps at all) the physical security of the US homeland.

US Type I deterrence against preventive, surprise attack would not be significantly threatened (we had too much of a surplus of deterrent power for that). But US extended deterrence, insofar as it threatened first-use, would be curtailed. (This might have been serious, even immediately, over Berlin; the Kennedy Administration had real fears of this; and Khrushchev certainly fed those fears in the fall of 1962. Why did he? Perhaps--counterproductively!--to deter any thought of attack on the missiles after they were in place and operational, by hinting at horizontal escalation against

New hope to deter US imperial of control before water

Berlin in case of attack. But that heightened Kennedy's determination to prevent them from becoming operational: even though he does seem to realized that doing this might lead itself to the loss of Berlin.

There is something of a paradox here; it might be resolved by inferring that, as he saw it, a Soviet move against Berlin--which he thought almost certain if he attacked the missiles--would not necessarily be successful if it came in the absence of the new deployments, and might be wholly averted if he got the missiles out by threats and blockade without an attack; whereas if he accepted the missiles, he would then get the blockade of Berlin and it would then be successful for the Soviets.

This suggests that Khrushchev would have been wise not to hint explicitly--rather, the reverse--that pressure on Berlin was to be expected after the November elections (i.e., as Kennedy understood these hints after October 16, as soon as the missiles were operational. Maybe better, oblique assurances that there would never again be pressure on Berlin unless there were an attack on a Soviet ally, or perhaps more specifically, on Cuba: though this is a bit more explicit about horizontal escalation than either power allowed itself to be.

Ask the Soviets: What was the import of the frequently-repeated assurances Berlin would not be a subject of public controversy "or pressure" until after the elections? This was a puzzling "reassurance" to all the American listeners, who pointed out that they could expect no thanks for this considerateness, that if they were going to make trouble for us it didn't make much difference whether it was before or after the elections.

enter before!

My hypothesis in 1964 may still apply: That Khrushchev hoped and counted on the missiles not being discovered till they were operational, in late October or early November (about the time of the elections); but that, in case they were discovered while they were going in, he wanted to minimize the pressure on Kennedy to attack or invade. If Khrushchev had announced the missiles openly beforehand or while they were going in--which Kennedy feared he would do (it was to avoid this that no warning was given after October 16 and no questions were asked of Gromyko)--then right-wing and mass pressures would have been intense on Kennedy to attack or invade immediately, especially just before this election in which Cuba had already become an issue. Indeed, if Kennedy had expected Khrushchev to announce the missiles during the campaign, he might have felt compelled to preempt, both with his own announcement and with an attack.

By keeping silent to the public (and ambiguous to Kennedy, so as not to risk leaks, or to force Kennedy to acknowledge the warning or risk exposure later, he permitted Kennedy the option of keeping silent himself about any evidence he might discover--

* What if = SIS took Cuban (Cassidy over) = sent SU to Berlin. (Assumed of NATO?)
2 sent to Moscow

explaining later, if necessary, that it wasn't "hard" enough--till after the election, by which time the missiles were to be operational, effectively deterring attack even if public pressures should then commence.

The references to Berlin and the elections could then have had two meanings, both serving this aim: a) As an oblique, coded reference to Cuba: "We won't give you trouble anywhere...in the form of a public announcement that will generate unwanted pressures on you during the campaign (if you don't announce the missiles yourself" (this coding would be necessary so as not to announce the missile deployment in case Kennedy did not discover it, and also, in case Kennedy did know, to protect him from an obligation to tell the public the announcement he had received or risk an embarrassing exposure afterwards: if Kennedy faced this choice, he would be tempted to preempt domestic pressure or criticism by attacking);

yes (b) A warning: "If you do choose to attack Cuba before the election, you should expect a new Berlin crisis as well, also before the election." In some cases this warning was almost this explicit. Since the Soviets were openly claiming to fear a US attack on Cuba--which was being openly called for by both Republicans and some Democrats--this would not seem gratuitous ^{not gratuitous} even if Kennedy knew nothing about the missiles. But if he should discover them, and feel pressed to attack for domestic reasons, or feel that the missiles gave him a perfect excuse for an attack he wanted anyway, he should then recall these warnings and reflect that he could not get away with a Cuban invasion or attack alone: he must also contemplate a Berlin crisis at the same time, also before the election. Khrushchev might have hoped this would slow him up: that it would seem too much to handle before an election. (See Rostow's memo on Khrushchev's interpretation of the 1960 election).

(I thought then that the timing was set precisely to take advantage of the elections, in the way to be described; but it now seems possible that Khrushchev was anticipating an invasion sometime in the fall, and was moving as fast as possible to head it off).

yes -- my "news" hypothesis

give copy
to MBG

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\nato\cpsna.02
30 December 1989

Kowz.t.

Notes for updating of Cuba II project for CPS/NA

--Gorbachev's changed mode of thinking, unleashing the power of the people in East Europe, has changed everything save the US mode of thinking, and thus we still drift toward unparalleled catastrophe.

--G's NWOT (new way of thinking), on its face, applies to relations between hostile or rival states: foregoing the threat or execution of violence (both of these are "uses" of weapons and of other preparations for violence). (Perhaps it is valid to distinguish between the threat and the use, or "direct use" of violence; whereas the threat of nuclear weapons is the use of nuclear weapons. One could, but need not, regard the threat of violence or of nuclear weapons as "violent." It does come under the category of "violence" eschewed by Gandhians).

But the threat of violence, based on preparations for violence, along with fear, hostility, and the projection of "enemies," are not only distancing factors in human affairs. They are also integrative factors.

They usually are central and essential factors in alliances and in hierarchical, dominant/dependent relations within imperial systems of states, even within some states. That is true both for NATO--the only institutional US foothold within Europe--and for the WTO, and for the USSR itself.

The fear and threat of violence that integrates an alliance or an imperial state relates both to fear of an external enemy and the need for integrated military efforts to confront it, and to fear and threat of violence by dominant military forces within the alliance or state.

For one alliance leader--the SU--to weaken or abandon these elements, is to weaken them for the other alliance and its leading power. And this has the "disintegrating" effect of weakening internal ties within both alliances, first and particularly within the WTO and the USSR. That is a reason for the perceptible resistance in NATO, particularly in the US, to "hearing" and reflecting on the new way of thinking, and for the effort to limit its implications and effects.

The fact is that the cohesion of both the WTO and the USSR depends crucially upon both the projected fear of an external threat and the public's fear in each country of the WTO of its own security apparatus: army and secret police. Certainly, in East Europe, the Party's power has turned out to have rested almost completely on the threat of violence against uprisings by its own

and the USSR's security forces.

For Gorbachev to write down an external threat, or the usefulness of responding to such a threat by offensive military means, was to question the legitimacy of using such forces against internal rebellion. (Interventions in '56 and '68 were justified on the grounds that rebellions against Moscow rule were instigated by an external threat, and served to weaken the USSR and the Bloc against such a threat.) This made intervention less likely, and encouraged rebellion.

This was, I believe, predictable enough on the Soviet side that Gorbachev could not have adopted and promulgated his new way of thinking unless he had already accepted its probable effect: the loss of the Soviet empire in East Europe, with a risk of disintegration in the USSR itself.

But on the NATO side, the removal of a threat or an enemy is a direct attack on, or subversion of, both alliance cohesion and US hegemony, the latter premised on the essentiality of US reinforcements and of the unique US contribution of large-scale nuclear weapons, tactical and strategic. If, separately, no member of the alliance need hang, there is no compelling need for them to hang together, or to accept the leadership of an extra-Continental power.

In Central America, the US invasion of Panama in late December, 1989 could no longer be justified--like interventions from Wilson's time to the Dominican Republic--by the need to counter Bolsheviks. Yet an intervention in El Salvador or Nicaragua could and would still be justified in those terms (with the legitimacy of a "Bolshevik" movement stigmatized even more than before by the repudiation of Bolshevism in East Europe and the USSR, and its association with Deng and Ceausescu).

And the absence of such a rationale--noted in commentaries by Strobe Talbott (Time) and David Ignatius (Wash Post Jan 1-7, p.24) as characterizing a "post-postwar" or "post-Cold War period"--did not slow up the Bush Administration at all in Panama, or in plans for a drug blockade for Colombia, or in intervening in the Philippines! (After all, intervention in this oldest sphere of influence for the US preceded the Bolshevik Revolution, and has never depended on the real presence of Communists).

If, as Robert Kaiser in the Post concludes, the changes in the USSR (including those to come) and in East Europe were virtually inevitable because the time of empires is past, the US Administration has not yet gotten the word, nor has the US public. Kaiser's account of the debilitating failure of Communism might suggest a reason: the Soviet Union could no longer afford the expenses of maintaining an empire (threatening and policing it, and subsidizing its weak links)--like the UK and France after World War

II--and the US can. Still. With some strain, and very considerable opportunity cost.

Empire in the US can be attacked as wasteful, foolish, reckless in the long run, damaging to our competitiveness and standard of welfare: but not as infeasible, paralyzing, crippling in the short run. Japan, Germany and Italy, the other cases mentioned by Kaiser, were forcibly deprived, or liberated, of their empires by military occupiers, and subsequently discouraged from overinvestment in military forces. Thus the first two can now be said to have won the peace, or the Cold War.

"Our canal"!

Is Panama an Empire's last hurrah, like Suez--or Afghanistan--a costly stalemate or fiasco that seals the fate of imperial dreams? Or is it, as Klare and Ignatius predict, the precursor of more such operations in a Latin American trading bloc and sphere of influence increasingly dominated by the US? (While Germany dominates a European trading bloc, and Japan an Asia one).

The tendency to look for and find new enemies--like druglords--and new worlds to conquer, new spheres to influence, will be strengthened by the very changes in Europe and the USSR that threaten to put the US armed forces and other employees of Cold War institutions out of work, meanwhile lowering their sense of importance and security.

*Commitment to Empire
→ Need to
an Enemy
(Willingness
to give up*

Budget pressures (in eyes of Congress and the Administration, reflecting the deficit and the need to avoid increasing taxes more than the competing demands for government spending on health, education, environment, infrastructure and foreign aid seen by "interest groups" in the public) will probably shrink the "defense" budget in the context of the new environment in Europe. The real fight will be on how much and how fast, as well as on the uses of the "peace dividend."

*image of
Enemy,
and/or
Offensive
Threats
(like Gorb.*

But the rearguard action to limit the cuts--and limit the uses to deficit reduction--may be quite successful. And even sharp reductions in the defense budget over time need not be accompanied by any fundamental change in the deployment of or reliance upon nuclear weapons.

*implies willingness to give
up Empire.
Likewise,
EU threats
(for us).*

The risk of major nuclear war in the short-run or mid-term has surely declined significantly, as the possibility of war between the US and USSR has gone down sharply, from low to extremely low (under Gorbachev). As Arbatov says, it takes two to tango. Whether in the Persian Gulf or the Caribbean, let alone Europe, Gorbachev obviously has no intention at all to engage the US militarily (or anyone else, outside the USSR: and quite possibly--this remains to be seen--not within the USSR either).

Nor does it seem likely that Gorbachev, or even a successor,

would provide such a high level of military support (if any) to a Third World adversary of the US as to challenge the US to threaten first-use of nuclear weapons (as happened in Korea, Indochina, the Cuban missile crisis, Egypt 1973, Iran 1980...)

1991 Yet: as of this moment, and in all current official plans and proposals, all the US tactical weapons remain in place, and US and Soviet strategic weapons, even after a START agreement, would remain enormous and mainly oriented to a preemptive first strike.

Neither before nor after a START agreement does the Administration yet plan to drop the procurement of any of the new first-strike weapons now programmed, including the MX, Stealth bomber (used in Panama!), D5, and SDI components with ASAT potential. Since the Soviets would retain many SS-18s and 19s under their START proposals, the pressure for LOW plans (launch-on-warning) on the Soviet side would remain.

(The new weapon most likely to be cut, because of budget pressure, is the least destabilizing, the Midgetman! Perhaps also the rail-mobile MX, in the same category: leaving 50 MX in fixed silos, the most destabilizing element in the forces).

Plans to reduce forces in Europe and Korea, perhaps by as much as 50%, do not at all propose removing nuclear weapons or renouncing a first-use policy; probably the opposite, an enhanced commitment, is currently contemplated.

Though the most likely cause of war during the Cold War era may disappear--an East German uprising against Soviet presence (still conceivable for the next couple of years, though unlikely to be met violently by Gorbachev)--turbulence is now much more likely than before within and between states of East Europe. Under a more militaristic successor to Gorbachev (more likely if Germany reunites too quickly, disarms too slowly or not at all and stays in NATO, or is a highly-armed neutral), armed clashes might draw in both the USSR and German or French forces (see French offers during the Rumanian civil war). Under current US planning, US forces would still be in Germany, armed with nuclear weapons, and nuclear-armed carriers offshore.

Even though any deterrent need for the threat of loss-of-control of nuclear weapons would have disappeared--it has already, if it ever existed--the weapons themselves and the actual possibility of loss of control by higher authorities in a crisis would remain, as would the possibility of crises. The lesson I draw from the Cuban Missile Crisis retains its relevance.

Likewise, US decision-making on Panama reveals the continued relevance of lessons of Cuba II and Vietnam about the role--in

stimulating violence and risk-taking--of Presidential psychology, feelings of humiliation and outraged dignity (and political vulnerability) aroused by the defiance of a weak, Third World adversary, whether or not supported by a strong rival.

Attitudes and principles associated with the most dovish wing of the antiwar, anti-intervention and anti-nuclear movements have now been adopted, for the first time, and are being acted upon by the leadership of a major power, in fact one of the two superpowers. That in itself puts such notions for the first time on the agenda for discussion and consideration throughout the world. It holds out the possibility, to say the least, that elites in both superpowers and/or within several major allies of the US will begin to act on this "new way of thinking": which largely corresponds to the thinking of the hitherto politically marginal "peace movement."

But it would be a great overstatement to imagine that this development is now inevitable--even given Gorbachev's powerful sponsorship of these ideas--let alone that it is already emerging. It might be more realistic to say that this is now at most--as well as at least--a possibility.

So far there is almost no hint of any acceptance of Gorbachev's fundamental ideas or "new thinking" in members of the Bush Administration, even though his own sincerity and willingness to act on them is now accepted. Nor has the Establishment or media begun yet to address these notions as deserving own own serious consideration.

On the contrary, Bush's Panama invasion represents the "old way of thinking" in its purest 19th-century imperial form. In response to the ending of the Cold War, US leaders seem to be regressing, going backward in time as Gorbachev, refraining from intervention in Rumania as in East Germany and Poland, enters the 21st century a decade early.

Even more ominous is the media, Congress and Establishment acquiescence in this move, along with mass public support, with explicit tolerance for the possibility that it presages new forms of crusading in the Third World.

There was not even criticism of Baker's bizarre invitation to the Soviet Union to provide a counterpart, by intervening in Rumania, of Khrushchev's Hungarian intervention to provide a distraction from and legitimation of our Suez. And this time not ally pulled us back from our folly, as Eisenhower did to Eden; though West Germany seems to have abstained, no major ally joined the Soviet Union, China and Latin America in condemning our blatantly illegal invasion in the UN Assembly.

Only in the still-marginal peace movement in the US (part of

the 20% of US citizens that opposed Panama) and in Europe--which originated most of these notions--is anyone considering a response to Gorbachev's "theses" that goes beyond a slow, decade-long process of halving the swollen Reagan-era defense budget, in the direction of the rapid denuclearizing and demilitarization of the planet, the effective abolition (or "near-abolition") of nuclear weapons and of war itself.

For thirty years I have striven to understand the sources of the risks of nuclear war so as to reduce those risks. Never before--until this past year, especially the last two months--has the possibility of reducing the danger of nuclear war decisively, in the relatively short-run (or ever), shone so brightly.

An era, not necessarily far off, is now realistically imaginable in which a historical analysis of past wars, crises and nuclear threats would be of only academic interest, no longer relevant to contemporary problems except as a warning of the human potential for folly. But that era has not yet begun, nor is it inevitable.

That it is a possibility, that ways of reaching it deserve immediate consideration, is already a radical shift in the context of analysis, one that has occurred: though so swiftly, so recently and unexpectedly that hardly any mainstream commentator has yet noticed.

For much of those thirty years my focus has been on the hidden nuclear dimension of our defense planning and crisis diplomacy: in particular, the almost-unknown pattern of secret nuclear first-use threats in crises and limited wars. In the first half of 1989, my particular preoccupation was with integrating new, often startling revelations about the Cuban Missile Crisis with my own still-unpublished findings from my participation in the crisis and high-level official study of it in 1964, so as to draw lessons for current policy problems.

As recently as the late spring of 1989, the task was to draw lessons from that crisis for a strategic environment that was unchanged in its fundamentals 25 years after my original study. To those--including the leading members of the Kennedy Administration--who already saw strategic parity in 1962, the lessons for policy that could have been drawn (had all this newly-released information been available) in the early Sixties would have seemed just as relevant, in the same ways, in early 1989.

But today the context seems sharply changed, with the possibility of much greater changes in the near future. Are the same conclusions from that history still relevant; or can the material be mined for other conclusions that would now be relevant, if not before?

I think the answer is yes to both questions. Though much has changed decisively in Soviet thinking, so little has changed in US thinking or, as yet, in the actual deployments of both sides that the specific findings from my research remain highly relevant to persistent risks.

Even though the risks are now almost surely lower than before, so long as Gorbachev retains power, and can with proper insight and effort be made still lower, they are not zero--indeed, my findings indicate, they are significantly higher than US elites have ever recognized--and their reduction is not automatic or inevitable.

Moreover, these same findings lend great urgency to our recognizing and realizing the opportunities that have now been opened for radical change in the military-political context of foreign and defense policy. If--as seems plausible--such achievable change could almost eliminate the risk of nuclear war, our responsibility to bring about such change on an urgent basis is all the greater if--as my study of past crises suggests--the danger of nuclear war under existing circumstances has been significantly underestimated up to now, and the sources of that danger misunderstood

If current Administration programs, practices and attitudes persist, the same sources of danger will remain, unacceptably and unnecessarily high, even if lower than before because of changes on the Soviet side. Only if US officials come to accept, and to act on and promulgate throughout the world, much the same new way of thinking that Gorbachev expresses can the potential benefits of that approach--its power to resolve, or to free resources to alleviate, our most urgent contemporary human problems--be fully realized.

An analysis of the shortcoming and dangers of the old way of thinking as dramatically revealed in the Cuban Missile Crisis and other instances of nuclear crises can contribute to motivating that shift in consciousness and practice in US elites and public. X